

CLAIMS

We claim:

1. A messaging system means comprising a plurality of messaging nodes, a plurality of user accounts with distinct messaging address identifiers, and a plurality of portable messaging units including

- a) storage means for the storage of messages;
- b) composition means for the composition of messages;
- c) display means for the display of messages;
- d) associative means for associating at least one of said portable messaging units with at least one of said user accounts, and
- e) communications means for conducting a data exchange with a messaging node, when in an immediate proximity of said messaging node;

where a plurality of said portable messaging units are each capable of conducting said data exchange at a plurality of said messaging nodes, when within said immediate proximity,

whereby a plurality of said portable messaging units may conduct two-way messaging via said messaging system when in said immediate proximity to at least one messaging node of said messaging system, and conduct user interface functions irrespective of location.

2. The means of claim 1, wherein said portable messaging units further include firmware means for controlling messaging operations.

3. The means of claim 1, wherein a plurality of said messaging nodes include a plurality of docking ports each accepting said portable messaging units.

4. The means of claim 1, wherein said messaging system further comprises a central server gateway for all messaging traffic between said portable messaging units and the Internet.

5. The means of claim 1, wherein said messaging system further comprises a central server with means for tracking and billing messaging traffic with said portable messaging units via said messaging nodes.

6. The means of claim 1, wherein said data exchange conducted between said portable messaging units and any network requires that at least one of said portable messaging units be physically introduced to said immediate proximity of at least one of said messaging nodes.

7. The means of claim 1, wherein the transfer of data between a portable messaging unit within said messaging system and any other type of electronic device requires that said transfer of data be conducted via said data exchange with at least one of said messaging nodes.

8. The means of claim 1, wherein said communications means include photonic transceivers within said portable messaging units and said messaging nodes.

9. The means of claim 1, wherein said communications means include supersonic transceivers within said portable messaging units and said messaging nodes.

10. The means of claim 1, wherein said communications means include low power radio transceiver equipment, with a communications range under 100 meters, within said portable messaging units and said messaging nodes.

11. The means of claim 1, wherein said communications means include a temporary data cable between at least one of said portable messaging units and at least one of said messaging nodes.

12. The means of claim 1, wherein said messaging nodes are geographically distributed in locations accessible to the public.

13. The means of claim 1, wherein said messaging system further comprises communications means for the transfer of messages to and from Internet e-mail addresses.

14. The means of claim 13, wherein said messaging system further comprises a central server, and wherein said communications means for the transfer of messages to and from Internet e-mail addresses is located at said central server.

15. The means of claim 13, wherein messaging nodes have direct Internet communications means for the transfer of messages to and from Internet e-mail addresses.

16. A method for the transfer of data between a portable messaging unit and a messaging node, where said messaging node

- a) detects the presence of a portable messaging unit in an immediate proximity;
- b) automatically enters a data exchange with said portable messaging unit;
- c) identifies at least one user account associated with said portable messaging unit;
- d) triggers the delivery of outgoing messages from said portable messaging unit;
- e) identifies incoming messages addressed to user accounts associated with said portable messaging unit;
- f) delivers said incoming messages to said portable messaging unit,

within a messaging system comprising a plurality of messaging nodes and a plurality of portable messaging units, where a plurality of said portable messaging units are each capable

of conducting said data exchange at a plurality of said messaging nodes, when within said immediate proximity.

17. The method of claim 16, further comprising the step of verifying that said user account has sufficient credit to receive incoming messaging traffic before said incoming message is delivered to said portable messaging unit.

18. The method of claim 17, wherein said messaging system further comprises a central server, and the verification of said sufficient credit is performed by said central server.

19. The method of claim 16, further comprising the step of said messaging node proactively buffering incoming messages for said user account prior to the transport of said portable messaging unit to the immediate proximity of said messaging node.

20. The method of claim 16, further comprising the step of requesting incoming messages by said messaging node for said user account subsequent to the identification of said user account at said messaging node, for immediate delivery to said portable messaging unit.

21. The method of claim 16, wherein said messaging system further comprises a central server, and further comprising the step of requesting incoming messages for said user account by said messaging node from said central server.

22. The method of claim 16, further comprising the step of transferring mail server information, including a username and password for said mail server, from said portable messaging unit to said messaging node; and the step of retrieving said incoming messages from said mail server, prior to the delivery of said incoming messages to said portable messaging unit.

23. The method of claim 16, wherein data exchange between said portable messaging unit and said messaging node is conducted via photonic communications means.

24. The method of claim 16, wherein data exchange between said portable messaging unit and said messaging node is conducted via supersonic communications means.

25. The method of claim 16, wherein data exchange between said portable messaging unit and said messaging node is conducted via low power radio transceiver equipment, with a communications range under 100 meters.

26. The method of claim 16, wherein data exchange between said portable messaging unit and said messaging node is conducted via a temporary data cable.

27. The method of claim 16, wherein at least one of said incoming messages comprises a text message.